

DIVISION OF SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
BOARD MEETING MINUTES
FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 2008

DSB BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Sharon Berry
Angyln Franquemont
Lori Hunter
Nola McKinney
Irma Nelson
Dickie Walker

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS PRESENT

Kara Aaron
Jim Hill
Ann Moore

DSB BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

James Johnson

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS ABSENT

Sandy Rowland
Ramona Sangalli

DHS Representative: Steven Jones

Attorney General's Office Representative: Erika Gee

Governor's Office Representative: None

DSB Staff Present: Katy Morris, Coral Virden, Carolyn Holbrook, Jim Pearson, Donna Walker, Tanya VanHouten, Amanda Walters, Chris McKenzie, Mary Cabaniss, Dorothy Brooks, Kandy Cayce, Ginny McWilliams, Lou Talley, Mona Mason

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Mrs. Nola McKinney called the meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA. Motion was made by Mrs. Sharon Berry to approve the agenda. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

APPROVAL OF 05/02/08 MINUTES. Motion was made by Mrs. Berry to approve the minutes. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

INTRODUCTIONS. All persons in attendance introduced themselves.

DSB INTERIM DIRECTOR'S REPORT –

NATIONAL LEVEL ISSUES- On the national level DSB continues to track the major issues including such goals as accessible currency and the movement to increase the Social Security Earnings limit. ***Accessible Currency*** scored a major advance when the D.C. Court of Appeals sustained a lower court ruling that the present U.S. currency discriminated against persons who are blind. The recent proposition on ***Social Security earnings limit*** seeks to move the limit for 2008 to \$21,600, and increase it further in 2009 to \$26,400, in 2010 to \$30,000 and 2011 to \$34,200. By 2012 the earnings limit would be set equal to the level for other persons who are of full retirement age. ***The Talking Book Program*** is still significantly underfunded compared to the congressional strategic plan for the program. Specialized funding for ***Transition*** and equitable funding for the ***Older Blind*** Program appear to be making little progress, and these will remain key issues in the coming months. DSB ***staff development*** is facing drastic change in that RSA has moved to consolidate numerous existing training programs across the nation into what looks like ten programs to be known as Technical Assistance Centers for Education (TACE). The danger to DSB is if the shift (under current consideration) is from the center in Hot Springs to North Texas. Besides the obvious geographic distance (and related cost) of the North Texas site, this change would present a considerable learning curve for the new center regarding the strengths and weaknesses of DSB training profiles.

CSAVR/NCSAB - In April, I represented the division at the semi-annual ***Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation*** (CSAVR) meeting in D.C. There is a separate ***National Council of State Agencies for the Blind*** (NCSAB), which usually meets at the end of the CSAVR meeting. Due to time constraints, I did not stay for the NCSAB meeting, but recommend that the new DSB Director, attend NCSAB next fall and continue to alternate attendance at each organization's meeting.

STATE CONVENTIONS - The Arkansas Council of the Blind (***ACB***) had an excellent state convention at the end of April and several of our staff members participated and enjoyed it very much. The ***AER*** state convention just closed as well, and during that event, AER named Mr. Hudson to the AER Hall of Fame. The group recognized the award by presenting a facsimile brick to Pamela Hudson. DSB was well represented at the Arkansas Rehab Association (***ARA***) convention in Hot Springs two weeks ago. ARA a very old, very strong organization and offers DSB cost-efficient training and organizational resources that would be expensive to replicate.

TRANSITION - Staff members have been working very hard to further the ***Arkansas Interagency Transition Partnership*** (AITP) statewide. The partnership includes all of the various entities in state government that are responsible for transition, including the Department of Education, Special Education Unit, Educational Services for the Visually

Impaired (ESVI), The Arkansas School for the Blind, DSB, etc. Strengthening communication with these organizations is particularly important to federal RSA, so DSB can show it is part of an actual ***system of services*** statewide. Staff is working closely with transition partners and have some initiatives coming up in the next six months with ESVI.

FAITH-BASED BRIDGE TO EMPLOYMENT - Division staff have been working with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to involve them in a performance based contract for partnership with Faith Based Organizations. The goal is for the CILs to ***distribute job-related information and training to representatives of faith based organizations*** who agree to share the information with persons within their membership who have significant vision problems and who are also members of minority populations. The CILs already work closely with the faith based community and already provide core services in independent living. We are hoping to use that existing network to be able to distribute VR information and related training and enable potential consumers to benefit from some of the organizational skills, talents and strengths that already exist in the churches around the state.

INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION - DSB is making some progress in securing the ***federally required signatures*** of all public institutions of higher education on cooperative agreements. We have UCA, UALR, and are looking at Tech coming in. National Park has committed. That leaves the U of A system that is already looking at signatures. They didn't note any major problems, but the lawyers are still reviewing.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AGING NETWORK - We have been working with Aging and have a formal plan effective July 1 to be partnering with them and actually tracking movement on some of their initiatives for older blind. They have an excellent web site with many links which would be educational for everybody.

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT - DSB continues to be represented on the Arkansas Workforce Investment Board (AWIB) even though the state act does not mandate it. One of the pieces of legislation that DSB will be submitting during the 2009 session is to amend the Workforce Investment Board act to name the DSB Director formally to that board. Federal Regs require that the head of the designated state unit for blind in Arkansas be a named member of the Workforce Investment Board, but the state law does not mirror that language. No one foresees any problem with the proposed legislation in that the Workforce Investment Board is very much in favor of correcting the oversight.

STATE PAY PLAN STUDY – DSB staff have been working with the DFA Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to provide them with DSB specific job descriptions, salary surveys, etc., required for the Pay Plan Study as a preliminary to the Governor's recommendations for the biennial budget. OPM has published the proposed pay plan in

the paper and listed it on their web site, but has ***not yet released recommendations*** showing how the pay plan would apply to DSB personnel.

JUMP START - DSB Area Supervisor Tanya VanHouten, who is also the DSB Transition Coordinator, reported that ***fourteen students*** will be participating in the Jump Start program for 2008. Some of the job placements are with Peter Miller Law firm; Mainstream Independent Living Center, St. Edwards Catholic Church Hispanic Outreach; Library for the Blind; a Vending Location; SCAT; Billy Mitchell Boys/Girls Club; Ray's Drug; Arkansas Lighthouse for the Blind, and the State Capitol. Participants will receive onsite training in the job and be paid appropriate wages. In the afternoons, they will alternate learning Technology, Orientation and Mobility, Independent Living Skills training, including meal planning and preparation, etc., and will learn how to maintain benefits and keep their employment in future positions. Some of the recreational activities students will enjoy include an Arkansas Travelers' game at the new Dickey-Stephens Baseball Stadium, a musical presentation at the Arkansas Repertory Theatre, and a ride on the Arkansas Queen River Boat.

REHABILITATION STATE PLAN PUBLIC FORUM - The Public Forum on the State Rehabilitation Plan was ***held April 1***. No consumers attended. This is not unusual for DSB, since there are numerous methods available through which people can access state plan information and submit comments.

VENDORS - The vendor's quarterly meeting was held May 3. One of the big issues is the continuing drop in vending locations. There are now 21 across the state. It is good to see the continuing increase in other vocational outcomes, but at the same time, we need to maintain vending as a viable business option for persons who are blind. One of the approaches we are looking toward, to increase the number of vendors and the amount of vendor earnings, is to expand locations that offer ***vending machines only***. The division is in the process of developing the biennial budget, and will request appropriation to secure additional machines.

PERFORMANCE - The board should be particularly proud of the recent efforts of DSB staff to provide quality services to consumers, and at the same time, keep up with the immense amount of paperwork required to document those services, all in a time of significant changes. Field staff evaluation and ***bonuses are tied directly*** to documented consumer progress and success. This fact was highly commended by RSA during the annual review.

SPECIALIZED TRAINING - The VR counselors have been attending an ***intensive training*** in Mountain View for the last two days and are benefiting so much from the training that they requested to continue training through today, which will force them to miss the DSB 25th Anniversary Celebration. The Rehab Assistants had received similar

training at Mount Magazine in March, and the Rehab Teachers are scheduled for their specialty training in early July. Feedback from each training will be utilized for planning at the statewide meeting tentatively scheduled for October or November.

QUALIFIED BLIND APPRENTICE PROGRAM - During the 2009 Legislative Session, DSB will be requesting appropriation and general legislation for the Qualified Blind Apprentice program. Under the program, well prepared consumers will be hired by DSB and placed in appropriate jobs in cooperating state agencies to give them a ***two-year paid internship in state government***. The first six months would be on-the-job training sponsored by DSB. The remaining 18 months of the internship would be financed by the participating state agency. The hiring preference would be exclusively to persons who are blind, as opposed to visually impaired, to provide job opportunities which are currently not available to blind persons, due to the inherent inaccessibility of the Arkansas Administrative Statewide Information System (AASIS). DSB has proposed the Apprentice Program in the biennial budget, and will work to get the corresponding legislation written and pursue legislative support.

Social Security Reimbursement - Staff, particularly, Ms. Cortney Heslep and Mrs. Feona Barnett, have been working very hard to secure Social Security Reimbursement as outlined in the Annual Review. To date DSB has received approval on ***\$185,000 in reimbursements***.

END OF COMMENTS BY INTERIM DIRECTOR

APPROVAL OF STATE PLAN – Mr. Dickie Walker made a motion to approve the state plan. Mrs. Sharon Berry seconded the motion. ***Motion Passed.***

CONSUMER OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE REPORT – Ms. Lori Hunter reported that, so far, the committee has received ***three nominations***: Dustin Brothers, nominated by Tina Shores (Ft. Smith Office); Lorri Ford, nominated by Debera Coleman (Little Rock Office), and Christine Cantwell, nominated by Tina Shelby (Harrison Office). There will be a minimum of twelve nominations by October 15. The Consumer of the Year committee will take the same type of approach as is done for the Employee of the Year, that is, they will look at the nominations against the standards, and select a Consumer of the Year. In the meantime, there will be recognition at the local level for each of the nominees, and a celebration of the overall winner at the December Board meeting.

APPOINTMENT OF EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR COMMITTEE 2008 – The 2008 Employee of the Year (EOY) awards will be given at the October statewide meeting. The committee will consist of ***Mr. Dickie Walker, Ms. Anglyn Franquemont and Ms. Lori Hunter***. The committee will receive eligible nominations collected by Mrs. Dorothy Brooks. The nominations can be made by anyone and are based on evaluation of

employees against defined criteria. The EOY Committee will review and score the nominations and select individual category and overall winners in time to have the award ready for statewide meeting.

ATTORNEY GENERAL'S OPINION. Chairman McKinney noted that the recent Attorney General's Opinion regarding DSB confirmed that the manner in which she had completed the evaluation of Director Jim Hudson in the previous year was correct. According to the AG Opinion, the *Chairman of the DSB Board is ultimately responsible* to evaluate the DSB Director, the way he has run the job, and determine any applicable bonus. The Attorney General's Opinion 2008-024, issued May 2, 2008, is on the Attorney General's Website. Following discussion of the evaluation process, Mrs. Sharon Berry made a motion that *board members have input* into the annual evaluation of the DSB Director by reviewing the evaluation criteria and discussing the Director's performance in executive session prior to the decision of the Board Chairman and submission of the yearly evaluation of the Director. Ms. Irma Nelson seconded the motion. ***Motion passed.***

DISABILITY RIGHTS CENTER REPORT (DRC) – No representative was present.

ARKANSAS INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL REPORT (AILC) - No representative was present. A report was submitted with the board packet.

CONSUMER INPUT – The National Federation of the Blind (NFB) Convention will be held June 28 – July 5 at the Hilton Anatole in Dallas, Texas. The American Council of the Blind (ACB) Convention will be held July 4 – 12, 2008 at the Galt House in Louisville, Kentucky. The state NFB convention is scheduled September 26-27 at the Holiday Inn Convention Center in Jonesboro.

CHANGE IN BOARD MEETING SCHEDULE. Mrs. Sharon Berry made a motion that the Board reset the schedule for the quarterly board meetings to the second Friday of each month from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. ***Motion Passed.***

The next regular quarterly board meeting will be held Friday, September 12, 2008, at 1:00 p.m. at the Department of Human Services, Donaghey Plaza South Building, First Floor, Conference Rooms A & B.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted,

Irma Nelson
Secretary